Senate Intelligence Panel Plans for Its Successor

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The Senate intelligence committee is drafting legislation to create a successor committee that could pick up any unfinished investigations early next spring.

The proposal would create a permanent Senate oversight committee with far-reaching jurisdiction over the CIA and all other intelligence agencies and with investigative authority over spy work conducted by the FBI or any other federal law enforcement agency.

Intelligence committee Chairman Frank Church (D-Idaho) said the recommendation will be submitted next month—before his committee's final report—and will be scheduled for immediate hearings before the Senate Government Operations Committee.

"Now is the moment for reforms," Church said in an interview. "If we wait, the shock effect of the revelations we've made will wear away."

He said he hopes for Senate action on the bill by March 1, the day after his committee is scheduled to complete its work. The legislation would also require action by the House, since the proposed new committee would have statutory authority.

"The committee would then have powers beyond what a Senate resolution could confer," Church said. "For example, the legislation would impose an affirmative duty on the CIA to keep the committee fully advised of all significant activities."

Other senators on the Church committee have privately voiced concern that their investigation is being wrapped up too quickly, to meet Church's desires to run for the presidency.

Staff investigations into a number of areas, ranging from the super-secret National Security Agency to problems of executive branch "command and control" over the intelligence community, have received only limited exposure at public hearings.

Church insisted that enough momentum for reforms has already been generated and that no further public hearings are needed. The committee is scheduled to spend its last 2 ½ months behind closed doors. New public disclosures are to be limited to printed reports.

"There'll never be a point where we can finish this work," Church said of the abuses that might be uncovered. "We've already extended our charter six months past the original (Sept. 1 expiration) date. The function of the committee has been discharged when we have sufficient basis for legislation, for reforms. If Congress follows through with an oversight committee, that committee will have the time to devote to any unfinished business."

The permanent oversight legislation, still being drafted, would put the new Senate committee in charge of all laws, including budget authorizations, for the CIA, the NSA, the Defense Intelligence Agency and all other agencies devoted to strategic intelligence. The oversight committee would, for example, take over the confirmation hearings for CIA director, now handled in the Armed Services Committee.

For the FBI and other law enforcement agencies now largely under the Judiciary Committee, the Church committee is considering asserting only the power to investigate their intelligence-gathering activities.

The House could amend the bill to provide for a joint congressional oversight committee, but Church indicated that he thought it safest to propose only a Senate committee.

The House intelligence committee, headed by Rep. Otis G. Pike (D-N.Y.), is expected to submit its final report and recommendations at the end of January, including perhaps a joint oversight committee. Its proposals may run into far heavier opposition. It seems likely, however, that the House would let the Senate set up whatever kind of committee it wants.